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READ BEFORE THE CONGRÈS INTERNATIONAL DE NUMISMATIQUE

BY

M. ROBERT WALLACE Mc LACHLAN

MEMBRE ASSOCIÉ ÉTRANGER DE LA SOCIÉTÉ ROYALE DE NUMISMATIQUE DE BELGIQUE

BRUXELLES

J. GOEMAERE, IMPRIMEUR DU ROI

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COINS

STRUCK IN CANADA

PREVIOUS TO 1840

OLONIAL enterprise among modern nations, mainly that of individuals or families equipped only for agricultural pursuits or fortune hunting, differs altogether from that of the ancient Greek cities, from which large companies hived off, consisting of all grades and trades, with full appliances for founding new cities in the wilderness. In the latter case, although a bond of kinship was long retained towards the mother city, the new community at once set up for itself, depending on its own resources, making its own laws, and, above all, coining its own money. On the other hand, the modern colony remained a dependency of the mother country, from

which a continued stream of emigrants set out, or were sent out, without supplies or appliances except for the immediate wants of a primitive agricultural population. The colonists continued to look to the old land for all the necessities of civilization and of the manufacturers, art; and when trade began to spring up amongst them, they made use of the small hoards of money brought out by the more wealthy settlers, or such doles as were shipped out by the king. This money no sooner made its appearance in circulation than it was shipped back as remittances: for, as the imports exceeded the exports, there was in those days a chronic scarcity of exchange. And, as the colonial authorities had neither the privilege nor the means to strike money, no adequate remedy seemed at hand, they often resorted to the foolish practice of raising by law the value of all coins, believing that this would prevent their exportation; but the only result was a depreciation of their currency and a disturbance of exchange and other trade relations with the mother country. The consequence of this scarcity of change was a return to the primitive mode of dealing by barter, or the adoption of a substitute for money. Thus, among the American colonies, beaver skins, wheat, tobacco or other commodities were declared to be legal tender in the payment of debts.

Such was for a long time the condition of the circulating medium in Canada. Even yet, no authorized coinage has been struck within its borders, although annual supplies, sufficient for the requirements of trade, have for a number of years been struck at the Royal Mint in London. These coinages, and one or two of those struck at earlier dates, bear special devices relating to Canada.

Towards the close of the seventeenth century, the scarcity of money in Canada was such that one of the Intendants settled the government accounts by *bons* or promises to pay written on playing cards cut in two. This currency, known as card money, was unhesitatingly accepted as a substitute for coin, and continued to be issued and to circulate freely until the government of France neglected to redeem it promptly. Then it became depreciated, and at the earnest solicitations of the people it was redeemed at a heavy discount and withdrawn from circulation. After this, a small coinage of copper was struck at the Mint at Rouen and La Rochelle; but it was altogether inadequate for the requirements of the colony, and the people were for a time in sore straits for want of money, until the Intendants again resorted to the issue of card money to pay the government debts. This paper money came to be issued in such lavish quantities, in the extravagant days before the conquest, that it became almost worthless.

With the advent of the English and a change from a chronic state of warfare, trade began to revive and there was soon a considerable influx of money, such as it was. This money consisted mainly of foreign silver coins, in which those of Spain, Portugal and France predominated. The current value of these various coins was fixed by law, and so different and fractional were they in amount, that it was difficult for traders to make correct computations when reckoning large payments or counting up their cash sales.

About the beginning of the century, a large quantity of old worn-out coppers of George II and III, withdrawn from circulation in Great Britain, was sent out to Canada and was soon absorbed into circulation. As this transaction

proved a profitable one to the importers. it stimulated others to import the anonymous English tradesmen's tokens of 1812-14. withdrawn from circulation about 1820. This venture also proved sucessful. and large quantities of light imitations of these coins were introduced into the country. Other light coins. with devices relating to commerce or to the victories of Wellington, succeeded those. Then Canadian devices were adopted; but nearly all were anonymous and so light that the profit to the importers must have been enormous: sometimes exceeding seventy-five or a hundred per cent. These light coins continued to be imported and to be pushed into circulation, in ever-increasing quantities. until the long suffering public began to complain. When the agitation became strong for the redress of this grievance, the customs authorities were instructed to interdict farther importations.

But this interdiction only served to stimulate a new move. The importers, not caring to lose so profitable a branch of their business. set up coining presses of their own. And as the striking of money was an altogether new industry to the country. and as few if any of the citizens seems to have made any advancement in higher art or design, nothing original or artistic was attempted. The coiners accepted for patterns such coins as were most abundant among those in circulation. The workmanship too was often so barbarous that it might be classed as inferior to that of the middle ages. while specimens occur that, like the early coinage of Western Europe, seem to be imitations of imitations so remote that hardly any trace of the original remains. Some years after this coinage had commenced, an engraver named Joseph Arnault came out from France and set

up an establishment for striking coins in Montréal. He struck a number of different pieces, some of which are exceedingly rare. All are original in design and display a much higher degree of art and better class of workmanship than the contemporary coins struck in Canada. It was about 1832 when this private coinage commenced in Canada, and although it did not extend over six years, so active and so numerous were the mints and so vast the quantities issued, traders were overwhelmed with copper change to the exclusion of all other forms of specie. Their receipts in this currency often exceeded fifty dollars per day; with, at the same time, two or three hundred dollars stowed away in their vaults. It was a burdensome duty in those days to make collections or carry home a week's earnings or the proceeds of a large sale. Again, a great outcry was raised, and in 1837 the whole copper currency was declared to be illegal. This created a scarcity of change, but towards the close of the year the banks came to the rescue, importing an adequate supply of what are inscribed as « Bank tokens », which they undertook to redeem whenever presented.

Although since then many medals and a number of private or advertising tokens have been struck in Canada, none have been issued for regular circulation.

Thus this Canadian money, unofficial and barbarous as it was, without any attempt at art or design, cannot be classed as characteristic of the people; and when the time comes, as come it must: for official money to be struck in the Dominion, there will be little left of distinctive national art in the coinage of any nation, for commerce and literary intercourse are so blending the different peoples, that few, if any, peculiarities in style will remain.

1. *Obv.* VEXATOR CANADENSIS a rude bust to the left.

Rev. RENONILLOS VISCAPE 1811 a roughly executed figure of a female supposed to be dancing. copper. size 26 millimetres.

2. *Obv.* VEXATOR ME CANADIENSIS a bust like the last equally rude.

Rev. Similar to the last. copper, size 26 millimetres.

These two coins are the earliest known to have been struck in Canada. The lettering is so irregular. and the execution of the figures so rough. that no one but the merest novice could have engraved the dies. All the existing specimens are so carelessly struck that the larger part of the legends are indistinct. It is therefore only with the help of four or five differently struck specimens that the whole inscription can be deciphered. They are said to have been struck by a blacksmith in Quebec and to have been issued as a political token satirizing the administration of Sir James Craig. who was Governor of Canada in 1811. He had. on account of his unyielding disposition. made himself obnoxious to a certain section of the community. It seems probable that. although prepared in 1811. the dies were brought out and refurbished for the great coinage of 1832-7. otherwise they would have been much rarer and heavier.

3. *Obv.* An indistinct outline of a bust in armour to the left.

Rev. The outline. faint and imperfect, of a female figure seated on a radiated shield. in her right hand is a staff and in her left a twig. copper, size 27 millimetres.

4. *Obv.* Similar to the last.

Rev. A roughly executed harp, copper, size 27 millimetres.

5. *Obv.* Plain.

Rev. Plain, copper, size 25 millimetres.

Of the first of these, there are about twenty-five varieties that may be arranged into a number of groups, each of which bears evidence of having been the work of a different engraver. From this, we are led to infer that each group was struck at a different establishment, and that these establishments were set up in different sections of the country. They are imitations of the worn-out copper coins of George II and III that at that time were still plentiful in circulation. The legends on these coins were so defaced by wear that the engravers never attempted to copy anything but the figures in outline.

The second, of which there are about five varieties, is similarly copied from an Irish coin. While these imitations continued to be circulated without question, others, simply plain discs of copper, were cut out of thin sheets of that metal, and, without any attempt at design, made to circulate, although some were stamped with one or more letters. Instances are related of workmen who, when they found it necessary to make any small purchases, would cut out sufficient of these copper discs for their requirements. Even old brass buttons with the shank broken off were not refused.

6. *Obv.* GLORIUVS IIIVIS a rude and indistinct bust to the right.

Rev. BRIII a female figure very roughly and indis-

tinctly outlined ; in her right hand is a trefoil, copper. size 27 millimetres.

Late in the eighteenth century there was a large number of copper coins struck in England, in imitation of the regular coinage, with unintelligible legends, and, as the busts displayed thereon were not that of the king, they could not be classed as counterfeits, although well calculated to deceive the common people. Many of these were brought to Canada with the old coinages mentioned before as having been withdrawn from circulation, and the coiner of the piece above described adopted one of them as his pattern.

7. *Obv.* Laureated bust of George III. to the. right within a wreath of oak leaves.

Rev. HALFPENNY TOKEN *exergue* 1812 a female to the left seated on a bale: in her right hand is a pair of scales and in her left a cornucopia, brass. 27 millim.

8. *Obv.* Similar to the last.

Rev. *Exergue* 1812 female as on last, brass, size 27 millimetres.

There are over twenty varieties of these coins, shewing every grade of art, from excellence to barbarism. Some of the better ones were undoubtedly imported. A hoard of copper coins was found a few years ago in the vaults of one of the banks at Quebec, having evidently been stowed away when the inferior unauthorized coinage was called down. This variety was very abundant in the hoard, while many of the specimens were bright and

uncirculated, shewing that at the time of the laying up of the hoard they had only just been struck.

9. *Obv.* A laureated bust in armour of George IV, to the left, rudely executed.

Rev. A harp with the date 1820 underneath, brass, size 27 millimetres.

This also exists in many varieties. It was also very abundant in the hoard, with uncirculated examples, which shews that it was coined simultaneously with nº 8 and that neither were struck at the time indicated by their dates, 1812 and 1820, but during the era of the light coinage, early in 1837. It is also worthy of note that the uncirculated specimens are found only among the ruder varieties.

10. *Obv.* A ship under full sail to the right.

Rev. SHIPS | COLONIES | & | COMMERCE, copper, size 26 m.

11. *Obv.* SHIPS COLONIES AND COMMERCE 1815. A very short ship under full sail.

Rev. FOR | PUBLIC | ACCOMMODATION a quaterfoil on either side of " for ", brass, size 28 m.

12. *Obv.* Same as last.

Rev. ONE | HALFPENNY | TOKEN sprigs of flowers above and below " halfpenny ", brass, size 28 m.

The first of these seems to have been a favorite design among the importers of coins, as there are over twenty varieties of Birmingham manufacture known, besides two

from the United States. The one of Canadian manufacture is inferior in workmanship and light in weight The dies seem to have been continued in use long after they were worn out, as specimens occur on which hardly any trace of the design is visible. The two latter varieties are also imperfectly struck. A hoard of them was found in Prince Edward Island, in an uncirculated condition, indicating some town on the island as the probable place of their mintage.

13. *Obv.* PROVINCE OF NOVA SCOTIA bust of George IV to the left.

Rev. ONE PENNY TOKEN 1832 a two leaved thistle, copper, size 34 m.

14. *Obv.* Similar to last.

Rev. HALFPENNY TOKEN 1832 a two leaved thistle, copper, size 28 m.

There are four or five varieties of each size, struck as counterfeits, imitating the full weight token currency imported by the Provincial government from Birmingham. The workmanship is much ruder, while a rare variety exists in which the date is, by mistake, made to read 1382. These counterfeits follow the mistake of the regular issue, which bears the bust of George IV two years after his death.

15. *Obv.* · AGRICULTURE & COMMERCE · BAS CANADA an emblematic bouquet consisting mainly of roses and thistles.

Rev. TOKEN MONTREAL a wreath of eighteen laurel leaves enclosing UN | SOU copper, size 29 m.

This coin was struck from a pair of dies found in the cellar of an old warehouse. Few if any were struck when they were first engraved: their size made them unprofitable, compared with the smaller coins issued at the time.

16. *Obv.* ✠ AGRICULTURE & COMMERCE ✠ BAS · CANADA a bouquet consisting of roses, thistles, shamrocks and ears of wheat.

Rev. TOKEN MONTREAL a wreath of sixteen laurel leaves enclosing UN | SOU copper, size 27 m.

Some of these coins also occur in brass, while nearly all of them have their edges milled. It was the first coin issued by Joseph Arnault and is still plentiful. The « un sou » series, of which there are over forty varieties, mainly imported from the United States, were accepted as currency for a short time after the withdrawal from circulation of the light coins previously described. Arnault seems to have profited by this fact, as this coin is as light as those withdrawn, while many specimens occur struck over numbers 5, 7 and 9, shewing that he worked up the unmarketable material.

17. *Obv.* * TRADE & AGRICULTURE · LOWER CANADA a wreath similar to the last.

Rev. BANK TOKEN MONTREAL a wreath consisting of laurels to the left and palm to the right enclosing 1/2 | PENNY copper, size 27 m.

18. *Obv.* Same as last.

Rev. PRO BONO PUBLICO MONTREAL a wreath consisting of palm to the left and maple leaves to the

right enclosing 1/2 | PENNY | TOKEN | 1837 copper. size 27 m.

Both of these coins by Arnault are exceedingly rare, the latter so far as known being unique. The same obverse die was used for both varieties. Their rarity may be accounted for by the breaking of the dies, or in that they were just completed before the withdrawal of the « un sou » series, when the « bank tokens » were made the sole copper currency.

19. *Obv.* THs & Wm MOLSON. MONTREAL. a cask within an inner circle; above is BREWERS below DISTILLERS | &. &. &. to the left UN and to the right SOU.
Rev. ✠ CASH PAID FOR ALL SORTS OF GRAIN ✠ 1837. An old style alcohol still, copper. size 30 millim.

The firm whose name appears on this coin was one of the most enterprising of the time in Montreal, having introduced steam navigation into Canada less than two years after Fulton's trial voyage on the Hudson. The coin is of full weight and now scarce, having been promptly redeemed when presented.

20. *Obv.* BANQUE DU PEUPLE MONTREAL. A wreath of five maple leaves enclosing UN | SOU; to the left of the wreath is a star and to the right a liberty cap.
Rev. ⋆ AGRICULTURE & COMMERCE ⋆ BAS CANADA. An emblematic bouquet in which a large maple leaf is the most prominent object, copper, size 27 millimetres edge milled.

This was also struck by Arnault. The bank official who ordered the coins was a sympathizer with the rebellion of 1837 and caused the republican emblems to be introduced. The cap of liberty meant freedom from British connection, while the star suggested the receiving of another state into the American Union. The coin is of full weight and although not common is by no means rare. It was the first of the « bank tokens » to be issued and the only semi-official coin of Canadian manufacture.

There may have been other coins struck in Canada during the time under consideration, but if any such there be, no specimens have turned up or all trace of their place of mintage has been lost.

Montreal, June, 1891.